

Injury Prevention Series

Ice Skating



Boston Children's Hospital

Orthopedics & Sports Medicine

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Common skating injuries

Repetition causes overuse injuries

Figure skaters need strength, endurance and the skills of a dancer to compete successfully. Not surprisingly, they practice moves and routines for hours on end, which makes them susceptible to overuse injuries. Shin splints, tendinitis, muscle strains and bursitis are common injuries. Traumatic injuries like fractures, dislocations and head injuries are rare, but they do occur.

Fortunately, proper technique, good equipment and plenty of time for rest and recovery may help skaters prevent injuries.



Skating Safety

Common accidents, serious injuries

Painful swelling may develop in the bony protuberance on the outsides and insides of the ankle (malleolus) when a skater practices too much or uses stiff or ill-fitting boots.

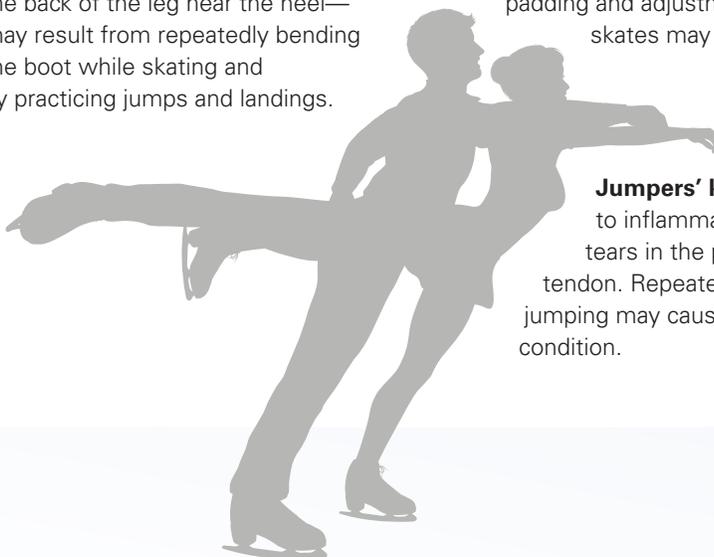
Achilles tendinitis—an inflammation of the tendons at the back of the leg near the heel—may result from repeatedly bending the boot while skating and by practicing jumps and landings.

Skin irritation may occur when skate laces are too tight or the tongue of the boot is creased or uneven. Protective padding and adjustments to skates may help.

Missed lifts and falls

may cause dislocation of the patella or shoulder. Most likely to occur in pairs, dance and synchronized skating.

Jumpers' knee refers to inflammation or small tears in the patellar tendon. Repeated, explosive jumping may cause the condition.



Preventing ice skating injuries

How can you prevent ice skating injuries?

- **Take part in off-ice workouts that develop flexibility and strength.** Focus on core stability so you can stay strong on your skates.
- Although some competitive skaters may feel pressure to maintain a certain physical appearance, **total body health, including proper nutrition, is essential for peak performance.** Coaches, trainers and parents should encourage proper nutrition and discourage overtraining.
- **Before you begin skating, warm up** with slow, controlled stretches and light aerobic activity, like jumping rope. To cool down, try static stretching to lengthen your muscles while the body is at rest. Be sure to hold stretches for 30 seconds or so.
- **Make sure your skates fit properly and are broken in.** When boots are too stiff, your motion is limited, putting stress on the ankle, knee, hip and back.
- **Also, make sure your skates are sharp, but not too sharp:** sharp skates have a tendency to pull rather than glide, which may lead to injuries with inexperienced skaters.
- **Check the ice for chips, bumps and divots that can lead to slips, falls and injuries.**
- **When learning new moves, limit the number of repetitions.** Hard landings put tremendous pressure on the body, and reducing the number of repetitions of high-impact landings may prevent injury.
- Remember that it can take years of training and practice to execute complex moves safely.
Match the move to your skill level.
- Overuse injuries occur when skaters train too much, skate with pain and don't leave adequate time for rest and recovery.
If you're in pain, stop skating. Try rest, ice, compression and elevation to deal with strains and soreness. If pain persists, seek treatment.



Recreational skating tips

You don't have to be a competitive figure skater, hockey player or ice dancer to enjoy the benefits of skating. It's a low-cost sport that offers a fun form of exercise for young people, adults and families alike. A great lower-body workout that provides tremendous cardiovascular benefits, skating can be enjoyed year-round at indoor rinks and in wintertime on frozen ponds and lakes.

Here are some tips for safe skating:

- **Take lessons!** Proper skating technique must be learned and practiced. Many community rinks offer lessons. Check them out.
- **The ice itself is important to skating safety.** Bumps and ruts may cause skaters to slip and fall, indoors and out. On frozen ponds and lakes, watch for hazards like sticks, rocks and uneven surfaces. Also, be sure that outdoor ice is thick enough to hold you. Only skate in areas approved by police or recreation departments.
- **Check your skates.** Make sure they're snug enough for ankle support, but not so tight and stiff that they cause pain. Also, sharpening your skates may reduce the risk of slips and falls.
- **Hard falls on hard ice may result in head injuries.** Parents may consider putting helmets on children who are just learning to skate.
- **If you take part in public skating, remember that skaters of all skill levels are on the ice at the same time.** Watch your surroundings, and leave plenty of room between you and the other skaters. Also, skate in the same direction as everyone else.



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This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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